

# AMBULANCE **UK**

DEDICATED TO THE AMBULANCE SERVICE AND ITS SUPPLIERS



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# WHAT'S HAPPENING ACROSS THE POND? COMMUNITY RESPONDERS – THE NEXT STEP?

We are all now familiar with the Community Responder – a volunteer trained by their local Ambulance Service to attend emergency calls near to where they live or work. Despatched to life threatening emergencies such as cardiac arrests their primary role is to reach the patient very quickly, then to stabilise their condition and in doing so, keep the patient alive until the ambulance crew arrive.

Community Responders are now a feature of every UK Ambulance Service fulfilling a valuable role. But are they being used to their full potential? I ask the question after a friend in the United States introduced me to the existence of their Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT).

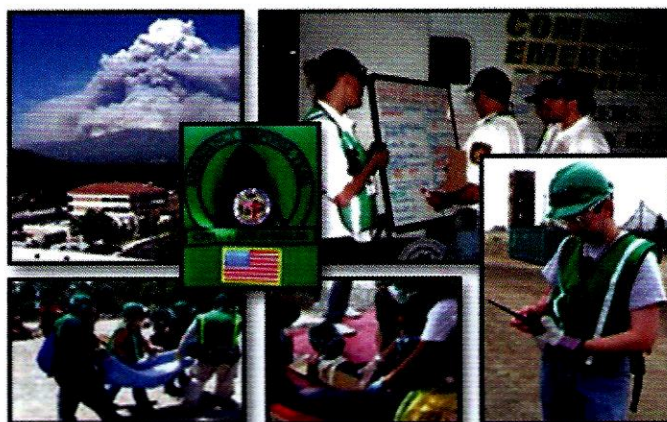
The first recorded instances of widespread local volunteer emergency responders in the US was in Los Angeles in 1985 when the concept was supported and developed by the LA Fire Department who recognised the need for preparing citizens to take care of themselves and others after a disaster.

In 1989 Local volunteers were enlisted to assist the San Francisco Fire Department run hoses from a fireboat to fire fighters ashore during the Loma Prieta earthquake and by 1993 the US Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) had made the CERT programme available nationwide. The 9/11 attack on New York together with other major incidents such as the San Diego Cedar Fire of 2003 resulted in hundreds of volunteers offering to help the emergency services in any way they could.

The role of CERT is to train civilians to undertake many of the 'routine' tasks required during an emergency thereby releasing the highly trained emergency personnel to concentrate on the more technical, complex and demanding roles they are trained for.

CERT personnel receive training to fulfil roles such as data gathering, simple fire fighting tasks such as turning off gas and electricity supplies, light search and rescue, triage and first aid. As the incident progresses they can be used to assist in the evacuation of residents or to help set up and man a Casualty Shelter.

FEMA recommends that a CERT Team consists of ten members led by the Team Leader. All team members receive the same level of training which means that at each incident the first CERT team member arriving can become the team leader for that incident. An initial assessment in liaison with the emergency services ensures that the team leader becomes aware of the potential logistical requirements in terms of water, food, medical supplies, transportation etc and he/she can then begin to determine how the CERT Team members can assist the emergency services and local authorities meet those requirements.



Obviously, in order to be able to undertake the duties required CERT volunteers have to complete a rigorous training programme. Aspects of the training Minor varies from state to state depending on what best suits each community but the following units make up the recommended core curriculum.

**Unit 1: Disaster Preparedness.** This includes identifying local threats, disaster impact, and preparedness concepts. The CERT concept and organisation are discussed together with the local laws applicable to volunteers in each particular jurisdiction.

**Unit 2: Fire Safety** – Covers the chemistry of fires including fire suppressions strategies, assessing a situation and the safe use of extinguishers to deal with a small fire.

**Unit 3: Medical- Part 1.** Cert volunteers are taught to diagnose and treat airway obstructions, bleeding and shock and to use simple triage and rapid treatment techniques.

**Unit 4: Medical – Part 2.** Covers Mass Casualty triage, helping to establish a treatment area and performing basic first aid in a safe and sanitary manner. In many states CPR training is also included.

**Unit 5: Search and Rescue** - Volunteers are taught search and rescue planning, search techniques, rescue techniques and, of course, rescuer safety.

**Unit 6: Disaster psychology** – Covers signs and symptoms that might be experienced by the disaster victim and worker.

**Unit 7: Course review and exercise** – Volunteers review their answers from their examination and practice the skills they have learnt. Successful volunteers receive a certificate of completion and some may continue their training to become a certified First Responder or an EMT.